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DOE Achieves Second TRU Waste Cleanup Goal in Two Weeks

CARLSBAD, N.M., October 6, 2011 –The U.S. Department of Energy has successfully removed all legacy contact-handled transuranic (TRU) waste from the Argonne National Laboratory (ANL), near Chicago, Illinois. In September, all legacy TRU waste was removed from the Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory (BAPL), near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Maintained by the DOE, ANL is the country's first science and engineering research national laboratory. This milestone was supported by \$83,000 provided to the National Transuranic Waste Program as part of a \$172 million American Recovery and Reinvestment Act investment to expedite legacy TRU waste disposal activities across the DOE complex.

"An important component of the Department of Energy's Recovery Act investment was to focus on waste removal from small quantity sites at locations around the country where a comparatively small amount of legacy waste was present," said Dave Huizenga, DOE's Acting Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management. "With this last shipment of contact-handled TRU waste from Argonne, we've now achieved goals to remove legacy TRU waste from seven small quantity sites with Recovery Act funds."

Small quantity sites are locations with TRU waste inventories that typically range in hundreds of cubic meters. The seven sites were funded under the Recovery Act for early cleanup to eliminate the risk associated with TRU waste temporarily stored at sites located near large populations. The sites include General Electric Vallecitos Nuclear Center, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory – Site 300, and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, all in California; Nevada National Security Site (Nevada Test Site) in Nevada; Nuclear Radiation Development, LLC in New York; Bettis Atomic Power Laboratory in Pennsylvania; and Argonne National Laboratory in Illinois.

ANL's final two legacy contact-handled waste shipments, containing a combined total of 70 drums of contact-handled TRU waste sealed inside of TRUPACT-II and HalfPACT shipping packages, arrived at the Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Project (AMWTP) in Idaho on Oct. 2, 2011. At AMWTP, the waste will be characterized and then shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) for permanent disposal. Additional shipments of newly generated remote-handled and contact-handled TRU are expected from Argonne over the next year.

The DOE has removed a total of 112 shipments of TRU waste from ANL. TRU waste consists of materials contaminated with radioactive elements that have atomic numbers greater than uranium, including tools, rags, protective clothing, sludge and soil.

WIPP is a DOE facility designed to safely isolate defense-related TRU waste from people and the environment. Waste temporarily stored at sites around the country is shipped to WIPP and permanently disposed in rooms mined out of an ancient salt formation 2,150 feet below the surface. WIPP, which began waste disposal operations in 1999, is located 26 miles outside of Carlsbad, New Mexico.